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Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 AID-05 /036 W
----------032042 180127Z /64-62
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FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6918
INFO AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 0215

MONROVIA PASS USAID

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, SL
SUBJ: AALC PROBLEMS IN SIERRA LEONE

1. SUMMARY. I CALLED ON PRESIDENT STEVENS AT HIS REQUEST JANUARY 17. HE INDICATED THAT BECAUSE OF INTERNAL DISRUPTION WITHIN THE SIERRA LEONE LABOUR CONGRESS (SLLC) IT WAS NOT WISE FOR OUTSIDERS, SEPCIFICALLY AALC REP, JOHN KILHEFNER, HOWEVER WELL INTENTIONED, TO BE WORKING WITH THE CONGRESS AT THIS TIME. AFTER FURTHER DISCUSSION THE PRESIDENT AGREED TO RECEIVE ME AGAIN TOGETHER WITH MR. KILHEFNER JANUARY 19.

2. PRESIDENT STEVENS, WHO WAS IN AN AFFABLE MOOD, RECEIVED ME ALONE. HE INITIATED THE CONVERSATION BY SAYING THAT AS US-SIERRA LEONE RELATIONS WERE NOW VERY GOOD, HE BELIEVED HE SHOULD LET ME KNOW ABOUT ANY PROBLEMS EFFECTING AMERICAN CITIZENS WHICH SHOULD ARISE. HE WENT ON TO STATE THAT THE SIERRA LEONE LABOR MOVEMENT HAD HAD PROBLEMS FOR SEVERAL YEARS. HE ADDED THAT ABOUT 18 MONTHS AGO HE HAD BROUGHT RIVAL GROUPS TOGETHER TO FORM A SIERRA LEONE LABOUR CONGRESS. SINCE THEN, HOWEVER, THE CONGRESS HAS CONTINUED TO HAVE
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DIFFICULTIES WITH CONTENDING FACTIONS AND WITH CLAIMS THAT THE OCTOBER, 1977 ELECTIONS WERE RIGGED. NOW AN ACCOUNTANT HAS BEEN DISCOVERED EMBEZZLING FUNDS BY SIGNING THE NAME OF SECRETARY GENERAL KABBIA TO CHECKS. THE PRESIDENT INDICATED THE AMOUNT MIGHT BE AS MUCH AS LE 50,000 AND ALSO IMPLIED THAT KABBIA HIMSELF MAY BE INVOLVED.

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3. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES PRESIDENT STEVENS DID NOT BELIEVE IT WISE TO HAVE OUTSIDERS, PARTICULARLY "EUROPEANS," INVOLVED WITH THE UNION NO MATTER HOW WORTHY THEIR ACTIVITIES MIGHT BE. HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THAT MR. JOHN KILHEFNER, AALC REP-RESENTATIVE IN SIERRA LEONE, HAD BEEN HERE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AND THAT HE WAS ENGAGED IN EDUCATION ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE LABOR CONGRESS. HE ADDED THAT HE FELT IT WAS NOT A PROPITIOUS TIME FOR HIM TO BE ENGAGED IN SUCH ACTIVITIES. HE DID NOT, HOWEVER, CATEGORICALLY STATE THAT KILHEFNER SHOULD DEPART ALTHOUGH THE IMPLICATION WAS CLEAR.

4. I BRIEFLY REVIEWED THE SCOPE OF AALC ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA AND WENT ON TO INDICATE THAT MR. KILHEFNER HAD PREVIOUSLY ASSURED ME THAT HE DID NOT ENGAGE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND HAD NO INTEREST IN SO DOING. I SAID I BELIEVED MR. KOLHEFNER BUT THAT I COULD SEE HOW OTHERS MIGHT SEE HIS ACTIVITIES AS POSSIBLY POLITICAL. I SUGGEST TO THE PRESIDENT THAT HE CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF MR. KILHEFNER OPERATING THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR RATHER THAN DIRECTLY WITH THE SIERRA LEONE LABOUR CONGRESS, MR. KILHEFNER HAVING PREVIOUSLY INDICATED THAT THIS COULD BE POSSIBLE. THE PRESIDENT SEEMED INTERESTED IN THIS IDEA AND PROMISED TO GIVE IT CONSIDERATION. HE ASKED ME TO SEE HIM AGAIN ON THURSDAY MORNING, JANUARY 19, TO DISCUSS THE MATTER FURTHER. I SUGGESTED THAT IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO HIM TO MEET MR. KILHEFNER AND LET THE LATTER EXPLAIN SPECIFICALLY WHAT HIS ACTIVITIES WERE. THE PRESIDENT
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SEEMED PLEASED WITH THIS PROSPECT TO THE EXTENT THAT HE INDICATED IF I COULD NOT LOCATE KILHEFNER, WHO IS CURRENTLY TRAVELLING UPCOUNTRY, BY JANUARY 19, WE COULD MEET NEXT WEEK.

5. COMMENT: IN THE COURSE OF THE CONVERSATION THE PRESIDENT MADE A BRIEF ALLUSION TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE LABOR CONGRESS IN THE STUDENT DISTRUBANCES A YEAR AGAO. HE SAID THE CONGRESS WAS ON THE VERGE OF JOINING THE STUDENTS AND "WE ARE LUCKY" THAT THIS WAS AVOIDED. IN MY VIEW THIS IS THE CRUX OF THE PROBLEM: THE SIERRA LEONE LABOUR CONGRESS IN THE ONLY ORGANIZED FACTION IN SIERRA LEONE WITH THE POTENTIAL TO STAND UP AGAINST STEVENS. I BELIEVE HIS TRUE INTEREST IS IN TAKING CONTROL OF THE LABOR CONGRESS, A PROCESS MORE EASILY ACCOMPLISHED WITH KILHEFNER OUT OF THE WAY. GIVEN THE SLLC SITUATION WE WERE NOT UNDULY SURPRISED THAT THE SUBJECT OF KILHEFNER SHOULD ARISE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR DISPUTES, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978FREETO00215
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780025-0847
Format: TEL
From: FREETOWN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780156/aaaabvgg.tel
Line Count: 111
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 59d3cfe2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3764464
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AALC PROBLEMS IN SIERRA LEONE
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, SL
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/59d3cfe2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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